

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 121 715

SP 009 969

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TITLE The Thrust and Scope of Teacher Centers and the Prospects for Curriculum Improvement.
PUB DATE [76]
NOTE 11p.
EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.83 HC-\$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *Curriculum Development; Educational Resources; Inservice Programs; Inservice Teacher Education; Organizational Effectiveness; Preservice Education; *Program Evaluation; *Teacher Centers; *Teacher Education Curriculum

ABSTRACT

California State University, Chico (CSU, Chico) has had a teacher center program underway for two years. By coupling the concept of centers with the traditional California requirement of a fifth year of professional training for preservice teachers CSU, Chico has designed, within a 70-mile radius of the campus, 14 teacher training centers, each having a two-phase program. Phase I includes coursework requirements along with a participatory observation experience. During Phase II the participants teach three classes and attend an on-site, semester-long seminar in teaching methodology. CSU, Chico has included in its center's scope a systematic approach to curriculum improvement from the "people perspective." In terms of the product dimension of curriculum improvement, however, the scope of the centers has not been realized. The teaching-learning environment is energetic; but the curriculum product is not systematically considered and improved. The British system assumes a different thrust and scope. Its thrust is inservice training while the scope remains curriculum improvement. British center goals are more obtainable because the school system is supported by the national government. Thus, the teachers have more control, a choice of what and how they teach, and more adequate resources. By making preservice a priority, the CSU, Chico program has not been able to sustain either a systematic inservice effort or a total effort at curriculum improvement. It seems, then, that centering must have an inservice thrust and adequate resources in order to be successful in curriculum improvement. (DMT)

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THE THRUST AND SCOPE OF TEACHER CENTERS AND
THE PROSPECTS FOR CURRICULUM IMPROVEMENT

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THE THRUST AND SCOPE OF TEACHER CENTERS AND THE PROSPECTS FOR CURRICULUM IMPROVEMENT

Since the teacher center concept has vaulted onto the scene there has been considerable speculation as to what should be the thrust and scope of a center. The purpose of this article is to first examine a California centers program which has as its thrust the preservice professional year; and, has as its scope the inclusion of inservice as an integral part of the center concept. Secondly, some observations and generalizations will be made about the thrust and scope of British centering. Finally, a synthesis will be directed to answering this question: If the teacher center concept assumes a certain thrust and scope, what are the prospects for curriculum improvement?

For the purposes of discussion, curriculum improvement is considered as a two-dimensional concept; the first dealing with people and the second dealing with product. The people dimension refers to, "...stimulating growth, learning, and alteration of perceptions and values on the part of all persons who are concerned with curriculum," while the product dimension refers to, "...improving the structure and the documents of the curriculum."¹

A CENTERS PROGRAM AND THE PRESERVICE PROFESSIONAL YEAR

California State University, Chico, has had a teacher center program underway for the last two years. By coupling the centers concept to the traditional California requirement of a fifth year

of professional training for preservice teachers, CSU, Chico, has designed within a seventy-mile radius of the Chico campus, fourteen teacher training centers. Each center, depending on the local population density, may consist of only one school; or, two or more schools within an area may be combined to make up a center. Each center serves approximately thirty-six professional-year students, half of this number working in Phase I; half working in Phase II.

During the first semester, or Phase I as it is referred to, coursework requirements are offered in the center along with a participatory observation experience (prescribed teacher aiding). The latter requires a minimum of ten clock hours per week involvement on the part of the Phase I participants. Assuming a successful Phase I experience, the participants will then student teach during the second semester, or Phase II of the professional year. During Phase II each participant teaches three classes in a major area and attends an on-site, semester-long seminar in teaching methodology.

In order to upgrade the quality of supervision and provide relevant coursework in the center, an average of two supervisors is assigned to a center on a full-time basis. Their assignment involves teaching and supervising Phase I and Phase II participants and identifying and meeting the inservice needs of the cooperating teachers. The staffing model is holistic, with the team of university supervisor, cooperating teacher, Phase II student teacher, and Phase I student aide working, as much as possible, in a helping relationship.

Pressures for changing to a strictly field-based program stem from two sources: the public schools and a change in teacher

credential laws. In terms of the former, the California Teachers Associations (CTA) over a period of years, has systematically adopted a series of positions concerning teacher education in California. These positions are summarized in a memorandum published on January 19, 1974. The CTA states unequivocally that CTA chapters along with the university should cooperatively train preservice teachers, and that the CTA should have a consistently high degree of input into the process.² In January, 1973, the CTA produced a model master agreement for implementing cooperative teacher training. For input into the master agreement the CTA recommends that the following parties meet: a) CTA chapter; b) teacher educators; c) college/university administration; d) school district officers; e) field-experience participants.³

The second area of pressure came from a change in the California teacher credential law. Under the Fisher Bill of 1968, the field experience component involved an average of six units. Under the Ryan Act of 1970, the Commission for Teacher Preparation and Licensing has required that the field experience component be increased to twelve units. Student teaching supervision, historically conducted on a drop-in visitation basis, is virtually eliminated under the Ryan Act. The resultant field center programs require faculty members to be present and actively engaged in instruction in the public schools on a daily full-time basis.

What is the thrust of the CSU, Chico, centers concept? Schmieder and Yarger have constructed categories of center types. The CSU, Chico, concept appears to fit best into the legislative/political consortium teaching center. The writers state that this type of organization is "characterized by an organization and

constituency prescribed either by legislative mandate or by political influence."⁴ Similarly, Emmitt D. Smith has placed California in a category of his study in which the following legal/political action has taken place within the state regarding establishment of teacher centers: a) legislation; b) administrative provision; c) state level study.⁵

Since the California Commission for Teacher Preparation and Licensing has more or less dictated a preservice thrust for CSU, Chico, centers, the question remains: Has CSU, Chico, included in the center's scope a systematic approach to curriculum improvement? From the people perspective of curriculum improvement, the answer is yes for the following reasons: a) the program is field-based; b) supervisors are continually available to cooperating teachers; c) because the program is field-based and supervisors are available, there is a discernable interaction among all of the parties concerned and a resulting drive for instructional improvement. In terms of the product dimension of curriculum improvement; however, the scope of the CSU, Chico, centers concept has not been realized. What seems to be occurring is a random and coincidental kind of inservice training. The constant interaction of teacher candidates, and university and public school staff tends to energize the teaching-learning environment; but, the curriculum product is not systematically considered and improved. Because of this, there are some insights to be gained by considering the British concept of centering.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON BRITISH CENTERING

In discussing the British centers Robert Thornbury lists some of the forces behind the movement: a) irrelevant preservice

training; b) inadequate inservice training; c) raising of the school-leaving age; d) the need to modernize the curriculum; e) needs of the inner city schools; f) a teacher surplus; g) a return to the academic basics; h) the Plowden, James, and Hatcher Reports. Because of these, he notes a rapid proliferation of centers in the late 1960's and early 1970's which he describes as "charismatic" and "spiritual".⁶

What can be said about the thrust and scope of British centering? According to Thornbury the thrust of British centering was inservice training while the scope was considered to be curriculum improvement. The people dimension of curriculum improvement seems to have been achieved for two reasons: first, the thrust of British centering was inservice; and secondly, the centers were spontaneously established by the local education authorities (LEA's).

Has the product dimension of curriculum improvement been achieved through British centers? While Thornbury professes the higher good to be curriculum improvement, he points out that in reality the immediate concerns of the LEA too frequently prevailed. Seemingly, the product dimension has not been achieved. Thornbury contends that inservice is only a step toward curriculum improvement (the retail side) and that curriculum improvement is a goal that is yet to be realized. Echoing Thornbury's concern about British centers, Bill Greenwood states that curriculum improvement should be the ultimate goal in a center concept and that inservice training serves only to stimulate curriculum improvement. Finally, Thornbury notes that the "charismatic" stage of British centers has passed and that next will come the establishment of permanent professional centers.⁷

What is there about the British system that directs the center thrust toward inservice training and the scope to curriculum improvement? The major reason seems to lie in the organization and structure of British education. Since British schools are supported by the national government, teachers have more control over what they teach and how they teach it. Because the local power struggle is mitigated, British teachers are more able and willing to innovate or to go in different directions with the school curriculum.⁸

CENTERING AND CURRICULUM IMPROVEMENT

If the teacher center assumes a certain thrust and scope, what are the prospects for curriculum improvement? Within the frame of the two models briefly considered there are three areas of concern.

First of all, if both dimensions of curriculum improvement are to be realized, it would seem that centering must have an inservice thrust. The CSU, Chico, center's concept has a legally mandated preservice thrust. By making preservice a priority, the CSU, Chico program has not been able to sustain a systematic inservice effort let alone a total effort at curriculum improvement. While the British concept has not achieved a complete curriculum improvement concept, it would seem that the potential exists given the inservice thrust and the vitality of its centering movement.

Closely related to the above is the issue of the adequacy of resources. Both the CSU, Chico, and British efforts will surely fall short of total curriculum improvement if they are not adequately supported. For the California program it seems to be futile to continue to emphasize preservice and continue to fall short of inservice. It would seem logical to shift more resources to inservice training giving perhaps a more realistic shot at curriculum improvement.

The third point to be considered is that of institutionalizing centers, which continues to be a question mark. The California program is institutionalized insofar as it has the force of law and administrative mandate. If legal and administrative force were to be placed behind an inservice thrust, would total curriculum improvement become any more of a reality than it is now? For the British centers the same question applies. While the start of British centers seems to have a grassroots kind of spontaneity, Thornbury has predicted the coming of professional centers.⁹ It would seem questionable that the spontaneity necessary for total curriculum improvement can be sustained.

¹Ronald C. Doll. Curriculum Improvement: Decision Making and Process. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 3rd Ed., 1974.

²Memo. "Excerpts from CTA Policies and other Council-adopted statements which seem pertinent in 1974's context. Memo to Teacher Education Committee of the California Teachers Association, 1705 Murchison Drive, Burlingame, CA 94010. January 19, 1974.

³"Master Agreement and the Preparation of Teachers." (Model) Teacher Education Committee, State Council of Education, California Teachers Association, January, 1974.

⁴Allen A. Schmieder and Sam J. Yarger. Teaching Centers: Toward the State of the Scene. Washington, D.C.: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, November, 1974.

⁵Emmitt D. Smith. "The State of the States in Teacher Centering." Journal of Teacher Education 25 (1), Spring, 1974.

⁶Robert Thornbury, ed. Teacher's Centres. New York: Agathon Press. 1974.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Paul S. Pilcher. "Teacher Centers: Can They Work Here?" Phi Delta Kappan 54 (5), January, 1973.

⁹Op. cit.